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Senate Furor on Letter Brings Apology by CIA

Director Helms Says He's Sorry For Praising Anti-Fulbright Editorial

By CECIL HOLLAND
Star Staff Writer

The Central Intelligence Agency found itself today in another turmoil with the Senate over a letter its new director, Richard M. Helms, wrote to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

The letter praised an editorial that was critical of Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Describing Fulbright as "crafty," the editorial said he had received "his come-up-pence" in the recent Senate vote side-tracking the committee's bid for representation on a CIA watchdog committee.

Senators expressed shock that Helms would have written such a letter and there were demands for apologies for Fulbright and the Senate—and these were quick in coming.

In the letter, which appeared in last Wednesday's Globe-Democrat, Helms said:

"I want to let you know of my pleasure in reading the editorial 'Brickbats for Fulbright' in the Globe-Democrat of July 18.

"It reflects so well your paper's policy of 'printing news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics.'"

Express Shock

A furor broke out when Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, D-Minn., called the matter to the Senate's attention yesterday. Four members of the watchdog committee, who had opposed the Fulbright group's proposal joined with others in expressing shock that the CIA director had written such a letter, and in praising it. Some Senators, including Fulbright, wondered if there had been more than one such letter.

The Senate discussion occurred one month to the day after Helms had been confirmed unanimously as director of the intelligence agency and praised as one of its most valued officials.

While the floor discussion went on, Sen. Leverett Saltonstall, R-Mass., a member of the watchdog committee, talked with Helms by telephone. He came back and reported Helms as saying there was only one letter and he was sorry that it had been written.

... It takes a little while for them to adjust to their new life." He said that Helms, who has served in the CIA and its predecessor organizations since World War II days, should have another chance.

Sen. John Stennis, D-Miss., also a member of the CIA committee, said he believed that Helms received bad advice and the letter resulted from this.

Telephones Fulbright

Thirty minutes after the Senate's indignation round ended, Helms telephoned Fulbright to say he was sorry and that the letter was a mistake. He also said he would be glad to talk to Fulbright's committee at any time.

The upshot of this was that Helms was scheduled to appear at a closed meeting today.

McCarthy, sponsor of the resolution for the Foreign Relations Committee to have a voice in CIA affairs, said it was "entirely out of place for Helms to have signed a letter praising an editorial that charged Fulbright was 'crafty.'"

"I'm not taking issue with the editorial," McCarthy said. "I suppose it was within the limits of irresponsibility which must be allowed on editorial pages."

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield said he was "more than a little surprised that the 'silent service' had seen fit to write to the newspaper. . . I think it is something which should be brought to the attention of Mr. Helms so that it will not become a habit with him."

Saltonstall said the letterwriting was "a very questionable thing." Sen. Frank E. Moss, D-Utah, called it "a grave offense" and said Helms "may have limited, because of his actions, his usefulness in the position he holds."

Young Disappointed

Sen. Milton R. Young, R-N.D., another member of the watchdog committee, said he was disappointed and shocked to learn that Helms would have signed a letter of this kind. "The CIA," he added, "is not supposed to be in the business of publicity and particularly publicity of this kind."

McCarthy said this was one of the problems we encounter when we promote career men.



RICHARD HELMS

rather than his own independent judgement. "I exceedingly regret the writing of this letter," Stennis added.

The letter, senators were told, originated with a CIA aide who read the editorial, which praised the CIA as "one of our most valuable agencies in foreign affairs." The aide, it was understood, prepared the letter and took it to Helms, who signed it.

What disturbed some of the senators was the fear that the letter would revive the controversy over the CIA and raise new questions about its operations. These had been eased over with the Senate vote of 61 to 28, after a July 14 closed meeting, sending the Foreign Relations Committee's bid to the Senate Armed Services Committee, where it now remains.

Fulbright, speaking briefly, touched on some of these questions. His feelings, Fulbright said, were "not particularly injured." But he added he had never heard of any CIA director writing such a letter and he was surprised that "a career man would have so little discretion."

Referring to the editorial's description of the Senate vote as a vote of confidence in the CIA, Fulbright added:

"I wonder if the director has not construed the so-called vote of confidence as a removal of all restraint and the granting of the power to do as he pleases within the area of domestic activities."

Tells of Rumors

Fulbright said he had heard rumors that the CIA takes part in domestic affairs—"for example in the elections in our labor unions. . . . I have heard these rumors and I would like to prove or disprove them."

Fulbright did not elaborate. But, it was learned, he had been informed by one union leader, who had asked for an inquiry, that the CIA had backed a union in the Dominican Republic that was allied with AFL-CIO President George Meany, and had supported Meany and Jay Lovestone, another union official, in their internal battles.

Fulbright also said that William F. Raborn, former CIA director, had suffered "a failure of memory" on a recent television news show. He said Raborn had remarked during the show that he had responded "no" when asked at a committee hearing several months ago if the CIA had used the Fulbright Student Exchange Program.

The committee's records show, Fulbright said, that Raborn had replied that regulations prevented him from answering. This, Fulbright added, led to his interest in the CIA matter.

He expressed appreciation for the comments of the senators who are members of the CIA watchdog committee, and added:

"I am encouraged that perhaps we may learn the new director some proper conduct."